



Developing Proper Muscle Memory

Lee McDonald

Like any skill, kicking and punting takes years of practice. As a kicking specialist, you must learn to be your own coach. Many kickers and punters must master their skills with little coaching. While there are a number of approaches to successfully kicking or punting a football, there are specific fundamentals that all successful kickers and punter possess. The off-season is the time to learn these fundamentals. I suggest reading everything you can about kicking or punting and working with an experienced coach or player. Understand what makes the ball travel high, far and straight. Know why you made or missed a field goal. Remember, those kickers and punters who can adjust their technique after making a mistake are the ones moving on to the next level.

Once you comprehend the fundamentals of kicking or punting, you must hone your mechanics as much as possible. The off-season is when you should do this. However, developing proper muscle memory takes thousands of repetitions, something that takes years of kicking. How can you speed up this process without kicking thousands of footballs? The sample drills and exercises that follow can be done over and over again without putting much stress on your body. Add them to your regular kicking routine as part of your warm up to maximize your practice time. Though it requires self-discipline, regular drill work will help you become a more consistent kicker in a shorter amount of time. This will speed up your long-term development as a kicker or punter.

Kicking Drills

A. Leg Lock Drill (2 sets of 10): a great drill to develop consistent muscle memory for kickers of all levels-no football is needed. First, mark a spot on the floor (athletic tape works best) along a straight line where the football would normally be. Stand beside this line, which represents your target line running to the center of an imaginary goalposts, align your plant foot next to your ball spot (take notice of where your plant foot should be depending on if you are using a block – see *plant foot placement* on the next page).

Balanced on your plant foot with a slightly bent knee, reach back with your kicking leg as far as possible and freeze for ½ second. Then slowly bring your leg down and lock out as if you were striking the football. Freeze again at the leg lock position for ½ second. Keeping your leg locked, finish by swinging up and through before freezing again with your leg locked and toe pointed down your target line.

It is ok to come slightly across your body with your leg swing but do not cut off your plant foot, keep your hips pointed down field. Keep your torso upright and allow your kicking leg to swing up and through the imaginary ball like a golf swing. Also note your

opposite arm position as you swing your leg, it should meet your kicking leg in front of your body when finished. Repeat to yourself: “Swing Back, Lock, Follow Through” as you hone your mechanics over and over again.



Swing Back



Lock



Follow Through

Tee Level / Grade	Plant Foot Placement*
2” Inch Block (HS Grades 9-11)	Foot Ankle bone 2 inches behind side football seam.
1” Inch Block (HS Senior)	Foot Ankle even with side football seam.
Ground (College Players)	Foot Ankle bone slightly in front of side football seam.

* Please note that horizontal plant foot distance is about one of your shoe lengths away from the ball or 7-9 inches. Use the above chart as a general guide but know that vertical plant foot placement will vary for each kicker depending in leg length and body type.

B. Kick & Skip Drill (2 sets of 10): is a similar motion to the leg lock drill except that the kick & skip is done at full leg swing speed-no football is needed. Here you will work on transferring your weight and power up and through the football and “skipping” down your target line 8-12 inches with your plant foot. After an imaginary impact with the ball, let your locked leg pull you toward your target. While you will finish slightly across your body, your hip and shoulders should be facing down your target line upon completion. The kick and skip should be done along a straight line to pause and check your follow-through and finish position after each swing.



C. Dry Run Drill (2 sets of 10): is used to practice the entire kicking motion without kicking the football. Align, stand, approach, and swing exactly as if you were going to kick the football. Practice taking your alignment steps back and over (use athletic tape to mark your stepping pattern). Focus on a slow controlled movement straight to the ball. Keep your steps compact and feet close to the ground. Do not hop or skip. Keep your head down and drive down your target line, “kick & skip” through the imaginary ball. When possible, do this drill along a straight line to check your form.



Punting Drills

A. Ball Drop Drill (2 sets of 25): Stand with your punting foot pointing straight down the line. Your hips, shoulders, and knees should be pointing straight ahead. Using proper drop mechanics, drop the football directly on the line. The ball should land flat and bounce straight back up to you, not forward or backward.

This drill is very important because it works on putting the football in the proper position for punting. Without the football being in a good hitting position, it is difficult to be a successful punter.



B. Leg Swing Drill (2 sets of 10): Using the same straight line, position yourself in the same position as the ball drop drill with your body pointing straight down the field and punting leg on the line. To do the leg swing drill, take a step with your non-punting leg, mimicking the punting motion straight down the line. Pick a point six feet in front of you to focus your eyes on and swing through this spot.

C. Step Drill (2 sets of 10): Assume the proper punting stance and have someone toss you a football to simulate a snap or throw the football and bounce it off the ground to yourself. Once you receive the football, take your steps and swing without punting the football. Let the ball drop to the side of your swing. The emphasis here is on developing rhythm and smoothness in stepping and approaching the football. Do not cover more than four yards. Keep head down and your steps compact.

Any application of the recommended material in this article is at the sole risk of the reader, and at the reader's discretion. Responsibility of any injuries or negative effects resulting from the application of any information provided within this article is expressly disclaimed.

Copyright 2007 Special Teams Solutions ®

All rights reserved. Information and images in this article are copyrighted and may not be reproduced without expressed written consent of Special Teams Solutions.